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LWWWI: ELECTORAL SECURITY REVIEW

A review of existing and potential vulnerabilities in Wisconsin and how to confront them

In response to recent reports surrounding election security, attempts by Russian actors to influence federal and state elections in the United States, and potential vulnerabilities to election equipment, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin seeks to investigate:

- *What are the security risks to the integrity and accuracy of the election process?*
- *What strategies are being conceptualized and implemented to mitigate these risks?*
- *And which of these strategies is the League capable of supporting and advancing in order to safeguard our elections?*

SECURITY VULNERABILITIES AND THE WISCONSIN ELECTORAL PROCESS

Wisconsin has a long history of well run elections. Numerous studies, recounts and audits have shown that we can have confidence in our electoral system. We must, however, continue to improve and evolve election administration to keep up with a changing environment. When people discuss election security, it can be difficult to identify what is at risk and understand which parts of our electoral process could be affected. While researching election security, the League identified four threats of “what could happen” if our elections were infiltrated:

Threats to Citizens’ Right to Vote: Fear around election security and election integrity in the past have led government officials to adopt harmful policies, like voter ID laws, that are known to disenfranchise voters in the name of securing our elections. Many of these policies are particularly harmful to our communities of color and other marginalized communities.

Threat to Voter Registration: Hackers could infiltrate the voter registration system (WisVote) and purge people from the rolls or interfere with their recorded data making it difficult for voters to cast their ballot. In addition, large number of voters not being found on the poll list and being directed to re-register on Election Day could cause long wait times to vote and cause disruptions during the day. Those without a proof of residence document available to them on Election Day could be disenfranchised.

Threat to Final Vote Counts: Hackers could manipulate the software or introduce new code to alter the vote count. Ex. making every 100th vote for candidate “X” a vote for candidate “Y.” This could lead to inaccuracies in the final vote numbers being reported to the public.

Threat to Voter Confidence: The threat of attack on our electoral system and misinformation campaigns undermine voter confidence. That lack of voter confidence in the system can lead to lower turnouts in elections. Communities of color have been hard hit by a history of attacks to undermine their voter confidence.

ACTIVE MEASURES TO MITIGATE VULNERABILITIES

After identifying the risks, League asks - What is being done to mitigate them?

Wisconsin has a number of good things already in place to keep our elections secure:

- The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) designed a custom voter registration system that has security measures in place to prevent malicious actors from infiltrating it and limiting the damage they could cause within the system.
- Wisconsin has Election Day Registration which acts as a failsafe for voters in case the voter registration system is hacked.
- Every ballot cast in Wisconsin has a paper record, so if there is an issue with the tabulation machines, election officials can go to the paper for a recount.
- Wisconsin municipalities publicly test voting equipment before every election.
- After every November election, state law requires election officials to conduct audits of the voting equipment used in the state to ensure that it is counting ballots accurately.
- And Wisconsin has voting rights groups, like the League of Women Voters, monitoring whether election procedures are being followed, giving voters information they can trust, and tracking the latest developments around election security.

The WEC, our state election agency, has been working to address immediate election security concerns. Their efforts have been enhanced with a recent influx of federal funding in the form of Help America Vote Act (HAVA) grant funding to be used to secure elections. Wisconsin was awarded \$6,978,318 in HAVA grant funding. The funding was released by the U.S. Congress in March of 2018 and states will have five years to spend the funding. Initial funds will be used for security software, principally a multi-factor verification system for WisVote, additional security training for clerks including implementing in-person training using regional leads as well as interactive online training, 6 staff positions (IT, Security Trainer, Grants Manager, WisVote Data Specialist, and Voting Equipment Specialist), hiring 2 additional IT contractors, and relocating WisVote and related applications to the highest security tier available with the state Division of Enterprise Technology (DET). Working with election security partners on every level of government, the WEC is coordinating with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Wisconsin DET to test Wisconsin's election systems, identify vulnerabilities, and offer suggestions of how those vulnerabilities can be addressed.¹

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ELECTORAL SECURITY AND INTEGRITY

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. We value fairness, transparency, accountability and accessibility in every election to ensure that citizens in our state can participate effectively in their government. The

¹ [Wisconsin Elections Commission: Draft of the 2018 Election Security Plan \(pgs 14-20\)](#)

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is continuing to investigate what more could and should be done to secure Wisconsin's election, and will continue to monitor the issue of election security as it evolves. That being said, here are our current recommendations:

Funding: The HAVA funds Wisconsin was awarded will help make our elections more secure, but they are not a sustainable source of funding. We need consistent, ongoing funding allocated by our own state legislature to ensure the WEC has the tools and staff required to respond to changing election security needs. We also need to ensure that our county and municipal clerks have the funding they need to securely administer our elections - from being able to phase out outdated equipment and invest in new technology to having the resources to effectively train poll workers to implement best practices (like post-election audits of election results).

Audits: Post-election audits should be included among the many needs that both the WEC and local governments need to address in order to ensure that Wisconsin elections remain free, fair and accessible to all eligible citizens. Recently the WEC gave county clerks direction that they can conduct post-election audits of election results at the county level.² Post-election audits of this type are optional, but should be encouraged. LWVWI supports the WEC's inquiry into how to bolster the auditing process, and know this must be considered among the mix of needed reforms.

Communication: Maintaining communication between election security officials, clerks, election workers, and the public during an election is challenging and important. Investigating and responding to incidents are best handled when a communication plan is implemented for all involved to follow to ensure the incident is handled quickly and effectively. WEC has invested time and resources into the development and training of a comprehensive communication plan that looks to correct past shortcomings and addresses real time concerns. LWVWI supports the fluidity of communication for all involved with the implementation and monitoring of election security situations on Election Day and throughout the year.

Training: Up to date and accessible training for all involved in the election process is vital for the implementation of enhanced security measures. The League supports the WEC's training modules for municipal and county clerks to give them the confidence and tools to address election security threats they may encounter in their roles. The League will continue to urge lawmakers to provide the WEC and local election officials with sufficient funding for the many factors involved with election administration and security as well as voter education about photo ID and voter registration.

WHAT NEXT?: ACTIONS FOR LEAGUES AND MEMBERS

To build voter confidence, Leagues and individual voters can encourage their county clerks to perform post-election audits of election results as directed by the WEC. Additionally, Leagues can

² [Wisconsin Elections Commission: County-Level Post-Election Audit Options following Partisan Primary](#)

encourage their members and other voters to attend public tests of voting equipment before each election. Municipal clerks are required by law to test the voting equipment for accuracy before each election, and rarely do members of the public come to observe the tests.

Recently the WEC posted a survey for election officials and the public to give comments about election security and to give suggestions about how to spend the remaining HAVA funds. The online survey asks respondents how they think the WEC can best use the grant funds to continue to improve and enhance election security beyond 2018. Respondents will also be asked, in their own words, how they would like to see the WEC spend the grant monies to help ensure elections remain safe in Wisconsin. The League encourages the public to submit comments.³

Leagues should continue to advocate for *informed* voting through voter registration and assistance drives, VOTE411 or other “candidates’ answers” voter guides, candidate interviews, and candidate forums. Leagues should also continue to host educational forums on understanding the media, encouraging civil discourse, and that address the concerns outlined above. This is especially important in communities of color and other marginalized groups who are being targeted by misinformation and other attacks on voter confidence. The League will continue our advocacy to oppose laws that reduce eligible citizens’ right to vote and assist voters who are negatively impacted by voting barriers.

The League encourages informed voting. Our voice is loudest when we all go to the polls. The best way to protect the right to vote is by exercising that right and voting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Wisconsin Elections Commission: Election Security in Wisconsin](#)
- [Wisconsin Elections Commission: Draft of the 2018 Election Security Plan \(pg 14-20\)](#)
- [Wisconsin Elections Commission: County-Level Post-Election Audit Options following Partisan Primary](#)
- [Wisconsin Elections Commission: Voting Equipment Audits](#)
- [Center for American Progress: Election Security in All 50 States](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice: Securing the Nation’s Voting Machines: A Toolkit for Advocates and Election Officials](#)
- [Brennan Center for Justice: A Smart and Effective Way to Safeguard Elections](#)
- [LWVUS Report of the Election Audits Task Force](#)
- [Principles and Best Practices for Post-Election Audits](#)
- [National Conference of State Legislatures: Post-Election Audits](#)
- [LWVWI 9.25.18 Statement to the WEC on Election Security and Audits](#)
- [WEC Seeks Public Input on Election Security Funding Plans](#)
- [WEC Open Meeting Agenda for September 25, 2018](#)
- [What Is the Canvass?](#) (How election results are certified.)

³ [WEC Seeks Public Input on Election Security Funding Plans](#)